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CIA Under Fire

Although quotation and attribution was prohibited, it became evident to newspaper men participating in high-level Kennedy Administration briefings in Washington, D.C., last week that there is sharp disagreement about the responsibility of the Central Intelligence Agency for the Cuba invasion failure.

Several officials intimated that another course would have been followed had the U.S. government known in advance the ability of the Cuban armed forces to mobilize to meet an invasion and the temper of the Cuban public, which did not rise to support the invading exiles. But some said this expedition by approximately 1,500 exiles was permitted because the exiles were so eager to make the try.

On the other hand, a top official insisted that the CIA did provide accurate intelligence of the strengths and weaknesses of the Castro regime, of the attitude of the people, and the ability of the invading force. This intelligence, he said, was accurately evaluated and it did reach the top echelon in government.

President Kennedy, in his address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, accepted full responsibility for the invasion attempt and failure. He publicly rebuked Secretary of Interior Stewart L. Udall for intimating on a TV program that it was a plan developed in the Eisenhower Administration. It is, of course, no secret now that the program of U.S. assistance in training and arming Cuban exiles was in existence in the latter months of the Eisenhower Administration. One assumes it was flexible in the matter of invasion strength and timing, and probably in use of U.S. military force (which Mr. Kennedy renounced).

The CIA grew out of the wartime OSS headed by "Wild Bill" Donovan and established by executive order. The CIA, established in 1947 under congressional law, and headed by Allen W. Dulles, brother of the late Republican Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, was a clear response to the need for intelligence in the post-war world. The glaring example of the consequences of not having adequate machinery to analyze intelligence reports and disseminate them to those able to do something about it was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Had all the pieces then been put together, we would not have lost a fleet.

But our clear impression is that Allen Dulles has no intention of being made the scapegoat for the Cuba fiasco, if such is in the minds of Administration brass aside from the President, who accepts the responsibility as his alone. There would be a tremendous political wrangle, for that matter, should Dulles be fired — and this at a time when Republicans and Democrats (except Wayne Morse) are making a great show of unity.

But it would be typical of Washington procedures were the CIA to be reorganized right out from under Mr. Dulles. There is much talk in the capital of restricting the CIA to the gathering of information, and assigning to other agencies the evaluation of this intelligence and the direction of training and launching guerrilla forces such as the Cuban exiles. There is also growing demand for an end to secrecy about the CIA budget, and of congressional investigation of the CIA.

In these exercises of agonizing reappraisal, it seems to be forgotten that the gathering of intelligence and its evaluation is far from an exact science. Also, we doubt the efficacy of any intelligence agency not removed from the policy levels of government. But we have no doubt that the President intends to find out if our CIA is as effective as it must be to counter the machinations of the Communists.